

Views *from* Mount Grace



WINTER 2021
VOLUME 32, NO. 3

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The view from the Littlewood Property—the newest addition to the Warwick Town forest and the first project completed as part of the Greater Gales Brook Conservation Project.

Greater Gales Brook Conservation Project

BY MARGARET THURSTON

Our Conservation Director Sarah Wells had just set up her campsite and was about to shut off her phone for the week when suddenly it rang. “617” – a Boston area code. With a mix of anxiety and hope, she answered the call. The news was excellent—we’d been awarded a \$589,000 grant from the Landscape Partnership Program for our Greater Gales Brook Conservation Project!

The project is one of the most ambitious that Mount Grace has led. It aims to protect a diverse 750 acres in Warwick, Orange, and Royalston before the end of June 2022, including a working sheep farm, forests, and unique habitats along 6 different streams. Including the state grant, we have now collaboratively raised 85% of the funds needed to complete this \$1.3 million initiative, together with our partners at Mass Audubon, the MA Department of Fish and Game, the MA Department of Conservation and Recreation, and the Towns of Warwick and Orange.

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Views from Mount Grace

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Dear Friends,

It's a cold and rainy day in our little corner of New England. Most of the leaves have dropped and those that hung on the longest are now finding flight in the powerful winds of this fall rainstorm. My house is not only cozy and warm, but also filled with the smells of a squash pie cooking. What could be better?

Growing up in Montague at a young age I joined the troops of children who spent summers picking vegetables grown in the rich Connecticut River valley. These hours were valuably spent being bitten by insects, developing hard-earned callouses after days spent with a hoe in my hands, and most importantly learning where my food came from. The farm I “grew up” working on, Blue Meadow Farm, subsequently became Red Fire Farm, a signature Mount Grace “whole farm forever” project.

This Winter 2021 newsletter focuses on our Greater Gales Brook Conservation project (which includes the protection of a sheep farm in Warwick), a farm project in Barre, the generous donation of beer brewed at the Stone Cow Brewery that is part of the Carter & Stevens family farm, the completion of the Mount Grace farmland inventory, and even the renovations at Skyfields, our very own farmhouse and headquarters. As we wind down the agricultural season, it is no coincidence that we seem to have local food and farm conservation on our brains. In the midst of crazy news articles about pending global supply shortages, it is reassuring to be able to bake a squash pie from locally grown and milled flour, baby butternut squash from Quabbin Harvest, and sweetened with a little local maple syrup. It's nice to know where our food comes from and that together we can make sure it is protected.

Warmly,

Emma G. Ellsworth
Executive Director

Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust protects significant natural, agricultural, and scenic areas and encourages land stewardship in North Central and Western Massachusetts for the benefit of the environment, the economy, and future generations.

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We welcome your articles, photographs, comments, and suggestions. For information about becoming a member or to request a change of address, please contact:

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Barre CR Honors Family Legacy

BY SARAH WELLS

Ruth Smith chose environmental education for her career. Over several decades she has taught countless children and adults to learn to appreciate the natural world, most recently with the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension and previously with New Hampshire Audubon. Before she was a professional conservationist, she was a little kid who grew up roaming 90 acres of sprawling woods and fields near the center of Barre. This is where she learned about the wild things around her, where she planted Christmas trees with her grandfather, and where she learned the names of the constellations from her dad on summer nights. For Ruth, the land was both “playground and university,” and she’s built her life around her curiosity and care for the natural world.

This passion became even more personal in 2019 when Ruth and her sister Karen were tasked with selling the family land. It was a weighty choice; the land had been in their family for 128 years. But their mother, Bertyne, could no longer stay in their historic cape house, and both Ruth and Karen had planted roots elsewhere. The family agreed that their first priority was to conserve the land. In September, they generously donated a Conservation Restriction to Mount Grace ahead of selling the whole property to the Walkup family in October.

Parting with land—especially family land—is often hard, even when it’s thoughtfully planned and necessary. Ruth recently shared, “I’m still convinced there’s an element of mystery and



Bertyne Smith (C), with her daughters Karen Clark (L) and Ruth Smith (R); this land is now Barre’s newest permanently protected open space.

wonder in all that sustains us. That’s something I will always have, a gift from that land, which is part of me, regardless of where I live.” We’re grateful to Bertyne, Karen, and Ruth for their optimism, persistence, and generosity as they honored their family’s long legacy of careful stewardship.

Greater Gales Brook Conservation Project *> continued from page 1*

The seeds of this project were planted 20 years ago, when 104 neighbors in Royalston, Orange, and Warwick joined together for the Tully Initiative. Together with the leadership provided by Senator Bob Durand, Mount Grace Executive Director Leigh Youngblood, and many additional state agency partners, they protected more than 9,000 acres in 2 years. While this initiative made impressive headway in conserving the Tully region, there are still gaps in the landscape that are not yet protected. The more connected the landscape is, the more safely and easily wildlife can move between habitats. This is critical in the face of climate change and increasing threats from development. Starting in 2019, Mount Grace partnered with Mass Audubon and two Warwick

residents to design a multi-landowner project to fill in these gaps in protected lands. Despite COVID and the challenges it presented to landowner outreach, nearly a dozen families decided to participate.

In an era of climate change, fast-paced development, and invasive species, the Greater Gales Brook Conservation Project represents a unique opportunity to build a more resilient landscape and continue the legacy begun by the Tully Initiative. Perhaps most importantly, it is a chance to build community – to work together to protect the lands we love and preserve the beauty of the region we call home.

The Land Forever: Building Updates

BY JAMES HOLCOMB

As part of *The Land Forever* campaign's priority to Work Responsibly, the much-needed renovations at our Skyfields Arboretum headquarters are well underway. For almost 18 years, Mount Grace has grown frugally in a beautiful old farmhouse that was donated to us in 1999 by Margaret Power Biggs. Though the office space has served the Mount Grace staff well, the house itself is long overdue for some much-needed repairs and upgrades. The old, rotted window frames have been repaired or replaced to make way for new, cost-effective windows. Pairing those improvements with our re-insulated attic, basement, and newly installed mini-splits will help increase the office's energy efficiency significantly. The dangerously steep, outdated staircase has been torn out and is currently being rebuilt to be safer and more accessible. Finally, the cracked and peeling exterior paint has been scraped and repainted to give this picturesque farmhouse the refresher it deserves.

These renovations are making a huge difference for our 15-person team bouncing around in this small, repurposed farmhouse. In the coming months, we will be gearing up to break ground on our new timber-frame barn workspace that will be built using locally harvested and milled wood, some of which will come from land Mount Grace conserved. It will also have a full solar array on the southern facing roof. This new workspace will be fully ADA accessible and be home to our new conference and meeting space as well as providing a space for community events. The renovations and new workspace seek to be a model of what is possible when balancing cost-effectiveness, as well as energy efficiency, all while sourcing locally.



Local craftsmen have now completed the new entryway at Mount Grace's headquarters, Skyfields Arboretum.

From Students to Stewards: A New School Trail

BY AMANDA CAROTENUTO

Behind the Dexter Park School in Orange lies a hidden natural space. The woods contain a small trail, filled with flora and fauna of all sorts, that has the distinct feeling of being apart from civilization though the school sits not far away. This small trail, around a third of a mile in length, had fallen into disuse by teachers and students alike until the opportunity arose to repurpose it.

Over the past few years, previous TerraCorps members worked directly with the school to clean up and reroute the trail entirely onto the school property. Youth and teachers gathered this spring ready to clear brush, paint trail markers, mark paths, and ultimately create an entirely new trail. These students also spent the year learning about the local wildlife that could be found in their woods. They chose their favorites to highlight

in informational signage using their own artwork and research.

Thanks to a MA Department of Conservation and Recreation Trails grant, this artwork will soon be on display for all to see in the form of educational books based on four main topics: plants, insects, vertebrates, and conservation.

After the art is installed, there will be a dedication event where the community will be able to explore the trail and view all the hard work these students have completed. Stay tuned for updates!

Three generations of TerraCorps Youth Education Coordinators have participated in this project, engaging nearly 200 students. Though the trail work itself will soon be completed, the impacts will last far longer.



Dexter Park School 6th grader paints a marker for the new trail.

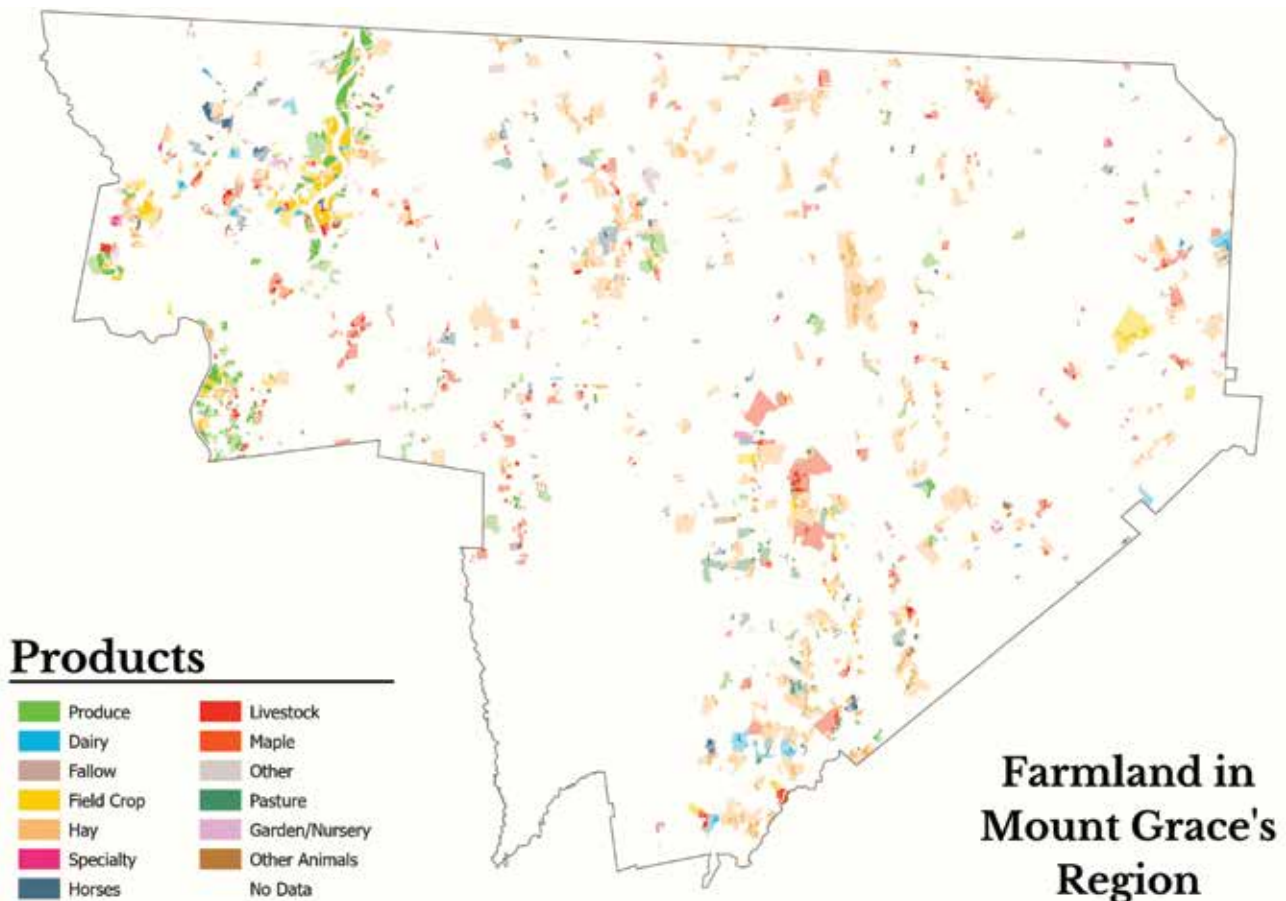
Farmland Inventory Maps

BY AARON NELSON

There was a whirr of activity in the Leyden Assessor's office as I sat down to discuss Mount Grace's Farmland Inventory on a warm September evening. As we went through my bundle of maps and GIS data, I heard about the farms in town, what they grew, and who the farmers were. I also left with notes on hayfields grown into tall forests, family histories, and questions about how conservation would affect the town's tax base. We also discussed the impacts of the solar arrays popping up on farm fields further down in the valley.

Since Mount Grace began its farmland inventory six years ago, these conversations have been at its core. The inventory was never just an exercise to find the number of fields producing hay or the acres of prime soils; instead, it has been an effort in both community conservation and conversation—a way to learn from those who work and care for the farmland in each of our 23 towns, and for Mount Grace to create a holistic conservation strategy around their vision for it.

Already the relationships fostered by the inventory have led to workshops on farm conservation and succession options. When we began planning our recent Pasture Management Workshop Series in Petersham, the inventories of surrounding towns also enabled us to reach out to farmers in a more tailored and effective way. We are now finishing a series of maps drawn from the inventories that exhibit farmland's role in habitat and climate resilience. These maps also reveal the historic loss of farmland to development. Mount Grace currently uses these tools as part of our conservation strategy. Early next year these maps will be made available on the Mount Grace website as a searchable, interactive tool for farmers, community members, town boards, and planning agencies. We hope that they will prove a catalyst for a new series of conversations and provide the foundation for proactive, community-driven farmland conservation in our region.



Draft map of the farmland inventory showing the primary product of each farm in our region. Farm fields are shown in darker colors, while other farm-owned land is more transparent. The inventory for Leyden is being finalized and is not shown.

MARGARET POWER BIGGS SOCIETY

Member Profile: Phil Stevens & Stone Cow Brewery

BY DAVID KOTKER

Mount Grace members are finding creative ways to support *The Land Forever*, Mount Grace's \$3.5 million campaign to prepare for the next 35 years of protecting working farms, forests, and open land. Phil Stevens, of Carter & Stevens Farm and Stone Cow Brewery in Barre, decided he could help by giving the gift of beer.

This summer, Stone Cow crafted a seasonal Mount Grace IPA, brewed with spruce tips to celebrate Mount Grace's work with both farms and forests, and one dollar per pint was earmarked for *The Land Forever*.

Spruce tips add a hint of juniper and were used by colonial brewers before the hops ripened in summer. "Beer is a great way to reach people who may not have heard about Mount Grace," Phil said. "A lot of people learned about the trust and our farm this summer thanks to the Mount Grace IPA."

After five generations, the family's business model has increasingly diversified to weather the difficulties Massachusetts farmers face. They've added raw milk and grass-fed beef at the farm store, ice cream, and barbeque on summer weekends. "Those all contribute to the business," Phil explained, "but the brewery is what makes it possible to keep running the farm, which is definitely a labor of love for us."

Phil sees Mount Grace as a great resource for farmers. "What Mount Grace does right now is spot on," he added. "The trust is ready to act quickly. Lots of people really want to conserve their land, and Mount Grace works with people to protect working



Phil Stevens at Carter & Stevens Farm in Barre with Flora.

lands like farms and woodlots. Keeping protected land in use is just more sustainable, since working land can support a family."

This year's IPA quickly sold out, raising \$3,000 for Mount Grace. Asked how the experience was, Phil replied "It went really well. I'd like to do another one."

If you would like information about joining the Margaret Power Biggs Society, please contact David Kotker at 978-541-1767 or kotker@mountgrace.org.

Winter 2021 Upcoming Events - Join Us!

Lawton State Forest Pre-Harvest Walk

Skyfields Arboretum, 1461 Old Keene Rd, Athol
RSVP Required

Mount Grace Office Open House

Skyfields Arboretum, 1461 Old Keene Rd, Athol
RSVP Required

Story Book Walk featuring *When Grandpa, When?*

by Terry Bouchard

Visit our website at mountgrace.org/events for more information.

Thank You To Our Supporters

Grants Received

\$589,350	Massachusetts Landscape Partnership Program
\$65,000	Tortuga Foundation
\$11,000	Land Trust Alliance Climate Grant Program

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Lynne's Falls, in Wendell, is one of the beautiful places that Mount Grace has helped conserve thanks to bequests from our supporters.

"Protecting the uniqueness of this place takes a lot of resources. That is why we made the decision to include Mount Grace in our will. We have a special opportunity to truly shape our region's landscapes. We hope you will join us."

– JULIA RABIN

To learn how you can help create a legacy with Mount Grace, please contact: David Kotker, Major Gifts and Grants Manager at (978) 541-1767 or kotker@mountgrace.org

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Our wonderful crew of volunteers over the summer into the fall for helping us run events, take care of properties, and everything in between!

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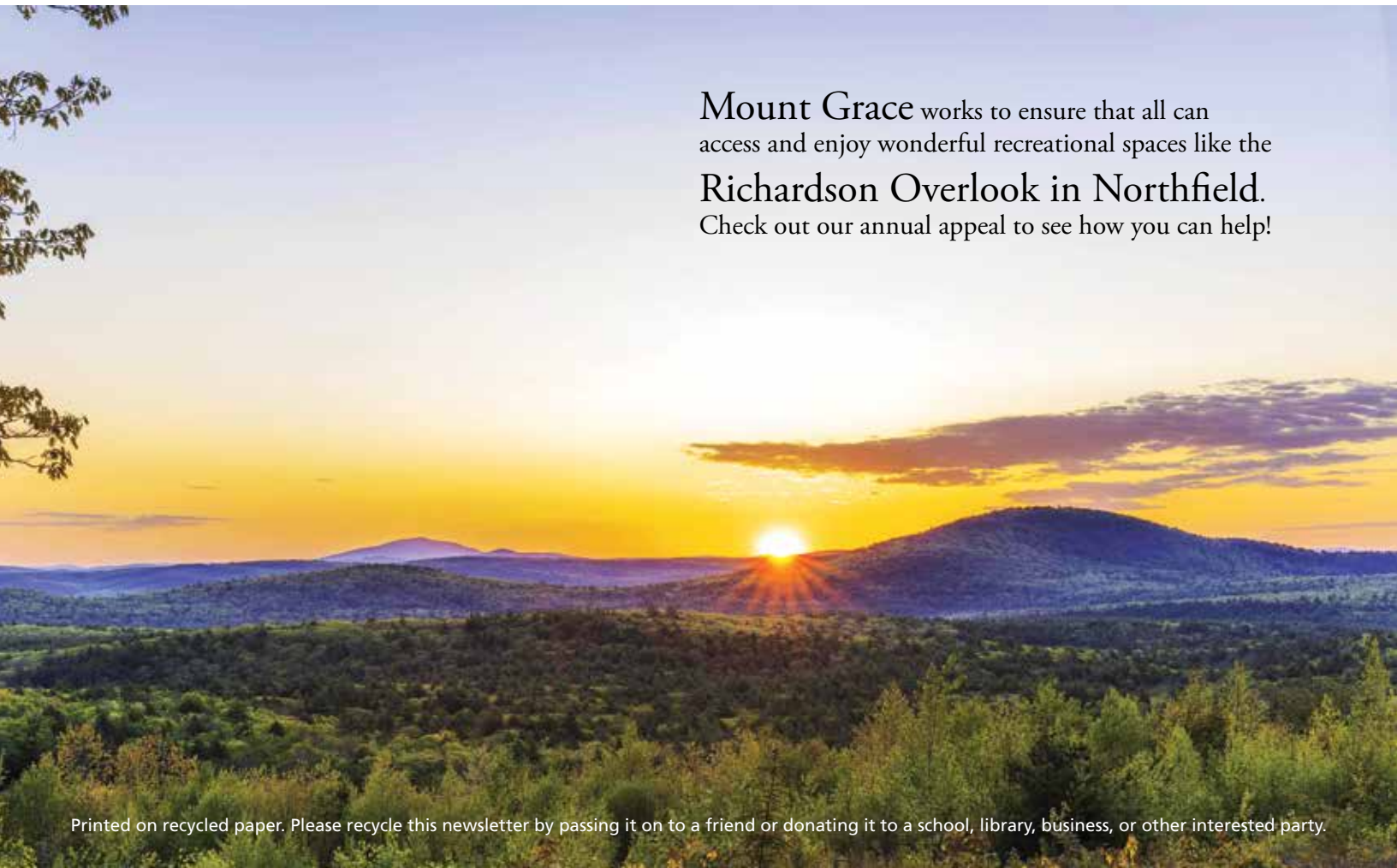
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Check out our annual appeal to see how you can help!